

REMARKS

This amendment is responsive to the Office Action dated August 3, 2009. Claims 1, 4-7, and 9-17 have been previously withdrawn from consideration. By this paper claims 18 and 26 have been amended. No new matter has been added.

At paragraph 5 of the Office Action, the Examiner rejects claims 2, 3, 8 and 18-30 under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph, as failing to comply with the written description requirement. The Applicant submits that the added limitation, “wherein the notifying does not require the approver being notified to access the electronic message from a common mailbox” is inherently disclosed in the specification because the specification does not describe reliance on a mailbox common to the different approvers to learn of status changes to the electronic messages.

However, in order to expedite prosecution, the Applicant amends claims 18 and 26 to remove the above-mentioned limitation. Accordingly, the rejection of claims 2, 3, 8 and 18-30 under 35 U.S.C. §112, first paragraph should be withdrawn.

The Applicant also amends claims 18 and 26 to further limit the ‘notifying’ step as, *“providing to the at least one other approver an indicator to be associated with the other approver’s copy of electronic message, the indicator characterizing the changed status”*. This amendment is supported by the specification, for example at paragraph [0031], i.e.,

If the second approver approved the message, it would remain in the first approver’s unapproved folder, optionally with an indicator that the message had been approved by the other approver.

The Applicant further amends claims 18 and 26 to limit the first limitation regarding routing an electronic message to the approvers by adding, *“each of the at least two human approvers maintains an independent copy of the routed electronic message”*. This amendment is supported by the specification, for example at FIG. 1 and paragraphs [0020] and [0021] (describing separate unapproved and approved folders in each of the approvers devices 110 and 120).

At paragraph 7, the Examiner rejects claims 2, 3, 8, 18, 23-25 and 26 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Lu in view of Hickey. As explained in more detail below, the Applicant believes the claims as amended overcome these rejections.

The Applicant agrees with the Examiner's position that Lu fails to teach "*once the electronic message is approved or rejected by one approver, notifying the at least one other approver of a changed status for the electronic message wherein the notifying does not require the approver being notified to access the electronic message from a common mailbox.*" The Applicant submits that the claims as amended overcome the rejection with respect to Lu in view of Hickey.

First, claims 18 and 26 have been amended to recite, "*routing an electronic message intended for a first user to at least two human approvers, wherein each of the at least two human approvers maintains an independent copy of the routed electronic message, and wherein each of the at least two human approvers can approve or reject the electronic message prior to the electronic message being routed to the first user*", where the underlined portions indicate text added by the present amendment.

While Lu teaches that the electronic message can be directed to two or more supervisory recipients, Lu is silent on how the two or more supervisory recipients have access to the electronic message. Lu does not teach each of the supervisory recipients maintaining independent copies of the electronic message. Hickey clearly teaches away from approvers maintaining independent copies of the routed electronic message, because Hickey teaches use of a group electronic mailbox for effecting status to electronic messages (see, for example, paragraphs [0010], [0011], [0012], [0020] and [0021]).

Second, claims 18 and 26 have been amended to recite, "*once the electronic message is approved or rejected by one approver, notifying the at least one other approver of a changed status for the electronic message wherein the notifying includes providing to the at least one other approver an indicator to be associated with the other approver's copy of the electronic message, the indicator characterizing the changed status.*" Neither Lu nor Hickey, alone or in combination,

teaches or suggests notifying of an electronic message status change where the notifying includes providing an indicator to be associated with the other approver's copy of the electronic message.

The Examiner cites Hickey at paragraph [0015] as teaching, "It is still a further aspect of the invention to provide an automatic method for updating and notifying members or users of a group of any changes in status information of received electronic communications, the received electronic communications are being continually operated on by multiple members or users of the group to cause changes in their statuses." (emphasis added). Hickey describes several ways of "updating and notifying", none of which include *"providing to the at least one other approver an indicator to be associated with the other approver's copy of the electronic message, the indicator characterizing the changed status"* as required by claims 18 and 26.

For example, as the Examiner points out, paragraph [0040] of Hickey teaches notifying by forwarding/directing electronic communications to a selected mailbox other than the common mailbox. Other members would be "notified" of a status change by observing the message in the selected mailbox. However, it should be noted that this forwarding/directing is in response to an automatic rules-based algorithm, and not in response to approval/rejection by an approver of a message that was routed to the user, as claims 18 and 26 require. Further, no indicator is used for this type of notification.

Another notification example from Hickey is described in paragraph [0021]:

The group electronic mailbox includes in the user interface a status indicator for each of the received electronic mails. A change in status of a received electronic mail in response to one or more prior acts of a first group member performed on the received electronic mail is communicated to other group members when they view the status of the electronic mail. (emphasis added).

However, the status indicator described here is related to the electronic message through a user interface to the group electronic mailbox. As such, it is not provided to the at least one other approver to be associated with that approver's copy of the electronic message as required by the claims.

Hickey at paragraph [0065] further describes notification according to a notification specification:

The flow chart of FIG. 7 shows an embodiment in which one or more recipients are notified by a predefined notification either automatically according to a notification specification when the profile and/or the content of a received e-mail matches the criteria template or selectively by a member of an e-mail group in response to an e-mail received in the member's group mailbox.

However, this notification relates to notifying recipients of an electronic communication, rather than notifying the one or more approvers as a result of an approval or disapproval of the communication as required by the claims.

In summary, none of the notifications described by paragraph [0015] of Hickey teaches or suggests the notification recited in the amended claims 18 and 26. Accordingly, those claims should be allowable. Since claims 2, 3, 8, 19-25 and 27-30 depend from allowable claims 18 and 26, those claims should also be allowable.

At page 4 of the Office Action, the Examiner responds to the Applicant's arguments regarding Lu paragraphs [0022], [0023] and [0024] failing to teach the "determining" limitation of claim 18. As noted by the Examiner in his response to arguments, the Applicant agrees that the Examiner never has cited "In the Reasons for Allowance." In the previous response, the undersigned erroneously stated "Reasons for Allowance" when he meant to state "Response to Arguments" with respect the citations from Lu. The undersigned apologizes for this error.

The Applicant agrees with the Examiner that paragraph [0022] describes a viewing screen that allows a supervisory recipient to manually approve or reject the electronic message.

The Applicant also agrees that paragraph [0023] of Lu describes a "predetermined policy" embodied by (as is known in the art) "white list" and "black list" filters (i.e., "... lists of approved or blocked senders 110 may be stored at supervisory recipient 160, or otherwise, to enable automatic screening of predesignated message types or sender identifications."). However, the Applicant disagrees with the Examiner's contention that paragraph [0023] implies that "what is

automatically configured not necessarily be configured to automatically screen and be done manually as well.”

Paragraph [0023] of Lu describes three different aspects of the screening procedure of the Lu system. The first aspect includes automatic filtering based on, for example, lists of approved or blocked senders, as described above. This first aspect of automatic filtering results in one of three outcomes: (i) forward the message, (ii) reject the message, or (iii) allow manual screening.

“... MS server 140 may compare the electronic address of sender 110 to the list of approved or blocked senders 110 and, based on the comparison, either forward the message, reject the message, or allow supervisory recipient 160 to screen this message of senders 110 personally, or otherwise.” (paragraph [0023], emphasis added).

The second aspect of the screening procedure described in paragraph [0023] relates to the third outcome of the first aspect, i.e., manual screening by the supervisory recipient (i.e., *“Approval may include a manual procedure performed by supervisory recipient 160 such as entering a command or pressing a key.”*). This manual screening is performed using the viewing screen described in paragraph [0022] to manually approve or reject the message. The “entering a command or pressing a key” described in paragraph [0023] are exemplary actions that can be taken by the supervisory recipient 160 to approve or reject the message.

The third aspect of the screening procedure described in paragraph [0023] relates to default approval that may occur if the supervisory recipient 160 fails to take action regarding approval/rejection in a predetermined period of time.

“Approval also may be a default condition that is presumed to exist after a certain time period of inaction by supervisory recipient 160 after receiving the electronic message.”

The “predetermined policy” described in paragraphs [0022], [0023] or [0024] is limited to the first and third aspect of the screening procedure, i.e., the automatic filtering for the first aspect, and the predetermined period of time for the third aspect. These paragraphs do not teach or suggest any policy restrictions on the manual procedure, presumably because Lu intends for the supervisory

recipient to apply his or her personal judgment to the approve/reject decision during this manual portion of the screening procedure.


By contrast, claims 18 and 26 require “*determining whether the electronic message is approved or rejected by applying a predetermined policy toward approval or rejection actions by the at least one of the approvers presented with the electronic message*” (emphasis added). In other words, claims 18 and 26 require that a predetermined policy be applied by the approvers themselves, rather by an automated portion of the screening procedure as is taught by Lu.

In view of the above amendment, applicant believes the pending application is in condition for allowance.

Applicant believes no fee is due with this response. However, if a fee is due, please charge our Deposit Account No. 08-0219, under Order No. 0113715.00134US1 from which the undersigned is authorized to draw.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ronald R. Demsher
Registration No.: 42,478
Attorney for Applicant(s)

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
60 State Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02109
(617) 526-6000 (telephone)
(617) 526-5000 (facsimile)